

Oral Questions

We know that the protectionists are alive and well in the Liberal caucus, but perhaps for once the leader of the Liberal Party on one issue can stand up and say: "I am against" or "I am in favour of the free trade agreement;" "I am against" or "I am in favour of the GST".

Stand up and tell us what you stand for.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a question as well for the Prime Minister.

Today Canada and Mexico are meeting in Ottawa at a ministerial meeting. Is the government asking Mexico in this meeting for side agreements supplemental to the NAFTA agreement to deal with the concerns of Canadians on matters like import surges, the environment and labour standards? If Canada is not doing that at the meeting today, what is it waiting for? If President Clinton can do it, why can't our Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have had a very productive series of meetings with the very impressive delegation of some eight or nine senior ministers from the Government of Mexico which is in town today. There will be meetings going on this afternoon.

I indicated to President Clinton that to the extent there would be any negotiation involving supplemental agreements of any kind, even though they did not impact on the content of NAFTA itself, on the substance of the agreement, that Canada would of course be part and parcel of any of those negotiations.

At that point in time, we would of course advance the Canadian interest. There has been no change on that point.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplemental question for the Prime Minister.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that when Canada is at the table with the United States and Mexico on supplemental agreements, it will raise issues of environmental standards, labour standards, import surges and human rights? Also, will the Prime Minister recognize that President Clinton has made clear that these negotiations have to take place and will be completed before he presents legislation to Congress?

Why will the Prime Minister not do the same and wait until these agreements are completed? Why is there a rush when it comes to Canada's interests?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there is no particular rush.

We want the House of Commons to have ample opportunity to be seized of an important matter and have all the time to consider it fully. We would like enough time to pass so that the Liberal Party caucus could agree on a position. That may take until the fall. We may find out about that the same day they tell us about their GST position.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Cid Samson (Timmins—Chapleau): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of employment.

The minister has expanded the definition of UI abusers to include not just those who commit fraud, but people who have a legitimate claim on unemployment insurance.

The minister plans to weasel out of paying benefits by not accepting any reasons for quitting. Just look at the buts attached to the just cause in the but book. Why is the minister exploiting the unemployed? Is it to satisfy the political right wing, to create a perception of a problem so that it appears necessary to find a solution?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I guess we could do as the hon. member once proposed: We should print more money to pay off the debt.

I said Friday last to the hon. member and his friends that demagoguery will lead nowhere. People in Canada who have just cause to leave employment are entitled to benefits. This government made a decision that a person who, without any valid reason whatsoever, chooses to become unemployed should not ask his neighbour to pay him benefits.

If the socialists have a different position on VQs, tell us what it is.